

Remarks of Jeffrey W. Runge, MD
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration
at the
Governors Highway Safety Representatives Meeting
New Orleans, LA
August 25, 2003

Colonel Champagne (Colonel James Champagne) and Colonel Landry (Colonel Terry Landry), thanks a lot for the invitation to Louisiana. Kathy (Kathy Swanson, Chair of the Governor's Highway Safety Administration), your distinguished leadership, as usual, has made this conference a success.

When I'm here speaking with you today, I want to remind you that I'm not just here speaking as Jeff Runge. I'm speaking with you on behalf of President Bush and Secretary Mineta, my two bosses, who are very clear that safety is the nation's number one transportation priority.

In the military tradition, Secretary Mineta recently called together the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the Federal Highway Administration, and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration in an All Hands meeting down on the plaza at our building. He called us together to "sound General Quarters" to our three agencies about priorities for the next two years. I have a little cut of the video tape from that day that I'd like to play for you now.

[A videotape presentation featuring compiled clips from Secretary Norman Y. Mineta's All Hands meeting begins.]

Segment 1: "And now it's time to acknowledge that history is calling us to another important test. It is no less important than others that we've had, and the stakes are no less significant. It is the battle to stop the deaths and injuries on our roads and highways."

Segment 2: "This is an All Hands meeting because I want everyone to know in your agencies, in this Department, that our top priority for the next 18 months is to use every tool available to reduce deaths and injuries on our highways."

Segment 3: "The mission is very simple: reduce deaths and injuries. The measure of success is just as simple: increase the number of people using seat belts and reduce the number of impaired drivers."

Segment 4: "Every day, across the nation, the alarm sounds in a thousand firehouses. A radio call goes to a thousand police officers, and the doors to the Emergency Department swing open thousands of times. And every day - right this minute, this afternoon, late tonight - the telephone will ring, a door bell will be rung, and a police officer will show

up at an office or at a home to tell someone that the person they kissed good-bye that morning is not coming home...ever again.”

Segment 5: “But I started these remarks saying that this was an All Hands meeting in the maritime tradition. Let me finish my remarks to you by changing that description. This is not just an All Hands meeting; it is a Call to General Quarters. All hands, man your battle stations.”

[NHTSA Administrator Jeffrey W. Runge, M.D., resumes speaking:]

Secretary Mineta told us very clearly at this meeting that we are going to do for highway safety what our Department did for transportation security in the wake of 9-11. And for those of you who know Norman Mineta, you can bet that he is very serious about this challenge. He’s asked that we - and our partners - pull out all the stops to put the full weight of the U.S. Department of Transportation behind reducing fatalities and injuries.

I’m fortunate that I’m not alone at NHTSA in trying to do this. Mary Peters is the head of the FHWA, and Annette Sandberg, our former Deputy, is now the head of the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration. The three of us have been all over the country - literally, from Anchorage to Miami - presenting the Secretary’s unified safety message to key organizations such as AASHTO, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, AAMVA, the trucking industry...the list goes on.

I’m sure you’ll hear today from the National Transportation Safety Board that it’s not just the Department of Transportation at the federal level that’s working on this issue. My former DOT colleague, Ellen Engleman, now the chair of the NTSB, is in a position with her board members to fan out across the country. I hope you have felt the effects of the FHWA and the FMCSA at work in your States, redirected towards highway safety purposes. If you haven’t, all you need to do is ask. Ask for their help, and their resources will be given to you to help with your mission, which in fact is our Department’s mission.

Last year, you heard me tell you about the Secretary’s goal, to achieve a fatality rate of not more than 1.0 fatalities per 100 million vehicle miles traveled by 2008. I learned yesterday from Kathy that the GHSA has adopted this goal, and I’m absolutely delighted. Thank you very, very much. *[applause]*

In June, the Executive Committee of AASHTO - our counterparts on the highway side - adopted this goal as their own as well. I think there’s no doubt in your minds, or in my mind, what we can do when we are all working on the same issue. We are unified in purpose.

The Bush Administration is placing a heavy emphasis on road safety through the highway authorization bill, SAFETEA. This bill represents over a year of diligent work by the Department - in feverish discussions among ourselves and ultimately in compromise - to bring the best bill to the President that we could give him, and for the President to bring the best bill that he could to Congress, given limitations on money in

the Highway Trust Fund. We expect this bill to engender public debate and indeed it is already doing so. I'm sure it will do so at this conference.

You may have your own opinions about many of the provisions. Our position is that SAFETEA will provide more than \$15 billion dollars over six years for highway safety programs, which is more than double the amount provided by its predecessor, TEA-21. As I told you last year, and I believe I even said this at your Long Beach meeting two years ago, precious resources must go where they are most effective. Everyone - *everyone* - is accountable for how the money is spent and the results that it brings.

Whenever President Bush meets with his appointees he always says the same thing: "It's the results that matter." He looked at us all and he said, "You know, you're not here just to look good. There is enough hot air in Washington already. What we need you to do is to bring results." The people expect it and they deserve it. That's what the "A" in SAFETEA stands for. It's about accountability.

Accountability is one of two key principles underlying the philosophy behind SAFETEA - and the other one is flexibility. Under SAFETEA, states would have broad new flexibility to transfer SAFETEA funds among very diverse safety programs administered by the state DOTs. As you know, this can be a two-edged sword. We are well aware of that. The movement and fungibility of these funds is to be based on each state's comprehensive highway safety plan, which must be based on your local and state traffic records and injury data. We're committed to making sure that the programs that we all need will be guided by data and that the data will be available to defend your programs from the traditional "big hogs at the trough" who are competing for funds too. The underpinning of that defense is accurate, timely and robust traffic records and injury data.

The "E" in SAFETEA stands for efficiency. The GHSA was instrumental in our trying our best to streamline the grant programs to make them simpler and easier for you to administer. We listened and consolidated eight current safety grant programs into just three. This should reduce the paperwork burden on the states, reduce your overhead, and allow you to spend your time and energy on doing what we all need to do - and that's to save lives.

I hope you appreciate the name on this bill. It's the Department's and the President's clear message about our top priority. The missions of NHTSA and GHSA are same, and we have a long history of interdependence. We will only realize progress towards our mission if we work arm and arm with you. We know that. I value all of your opinions about the highway bill and hope that you will keep the dialogue going so that your Representatives in Congress might get on with business and give us a six year bill instead of a continuing resolution. *[applause]*

I also made this point at your meeting last year and maybe even the year before. I asked our analysts to take a look at where lives can be saved by countermeasure, which areas we could work in that would save the greatest number of lives. And maybe you've seen this slide ad nauseum, but I'm going to keep showing it until everybody in America

figures this out. The most lives that we can save on the highways will come from two key areas: safety belt use and alcohol. If we can get safety belt use to 90% we will save a third of the lives that can be saved on the road today. By reducing impaired driving by a third - just a third - can save yet *another* third of the lives we believe that can be saved on the road today. So the data are very clear. We have to place our highest priorities on raising safety belt use and reducing impaired driving.

What we will do in these two areas will make the most difference, and again, it's about results. The result that makes all of us want to get up and go to work every single morning is to get these numbers down and get them under control. You all showed me this past May in no uncertain terms how dedicated you are. However the safety belt campaign turned out, I want you to know that I am highly honored to be working with you, a group that is so unbelievably dedicated to getting this job done. You and your colleagues in law enforcement absolutely blew me away this past May and in July with the Mobilizations that went on for *Click-It or Ticket* and *You Drink and Drive. You Lose.*

At the beginning of the current year you were faced with this budget impasse, this continuing resolution, that went on for some time. I was very frightened about what was going on. I was very concerned. My Regional Administrators will tell you, I came into a meeting when they were all in Washington and I said, "I'm worried here. I'm really worried. We can't get the resources out to the states and the state budgets are sucking wind. How in the world are we going to get belt use up this year?" Around the room, they said, "Don't worry, the G.R.'s are on it. All we need is to say go, and they'll get the job done. So take a deep breath." I said, "Ok, I believe you - maybe." We asked an awful lot of you, asked you to work with very, very, very thin resources, well into March. I'm proud and honored to sit here with you. For those of you here not listening to the radio this morning, I want to tell you what you did: safety belt use is 79% in the United States of America. *[extended applause]*

Last year I asked that you align your goals with our goals. We told Congress what we thought we might be able to do. If we did everything possible, if we converted 10% of the non-users out there, we estimated that we could get to 77.6% belt use nationally. Then we took your averages of what you said you could do, if you did everything that you thought you could do, and it came out to a 77.4%, a weighted average. We told Congress, we'll do one better than that, we will go to 78%. And we are at 79%. You all exceeded the goals, and I can't thank you enough.

Now this slide shows the really good news. I'm a relative newcomer into injury control. I came along in about at the beginning of this draft, in 1984 or 1985, when belt use was down around 10%. I have had the benefit of having a nation that has been belting up at a higher rate every year.

We can see this in the emergency department. When you have a car crash coming in, it's different than what it was when I was a resident in emergency medicine in 1981. You just don't spend much time picking glass out of their foreheads. There are not as many

broken necks. There are not a many people ejected. It's cheaper and easier to take care of people in a car crash than ever before. This is an important thing.

And your work to get the rate from 75% to 79%! Keep in mind the further we get up the scale, the more recalcitrant the non-belt users are. Every percentage point increase is even tougher to get than the last. The better we get, the tougher our work gets. You guys went 4 percentage points in one year. Ladies and gentlemen, that is 1,000 more people that will be here at the end of this year for the holiday season, people who will be with their families, people who would otherwise not be here. It's 16,000 serious injuries that will *never* go to our trauma centers to clog up the works and to raise the cost of medical care. It's 3.1 billion dollars in economic savings from medical care, lost productivity, insurance, administration costs and legal fees. That's a huge return on investment here. This is the way we like to do business. It is sound public policy. This is a good expenditure of time, it's a great return on investment, and it's sweat equity. I thank you'll very much for that.

I would like to show you some maps of what states are doing and what states aren't doing. This one is all green, because everybody pitched in the *Click-it or Ticket* Campaign. Every state participated in some way. I thank you. *[applause]*

The results showed variation by region again. As in the past, the western states posted the highest usage. *[applause]* People used to get sick of hearing about the North Carolina; now we are sick of hearing about the West. *[laughter]* I want to point out that the Northeast and the South actually had the largest gains, showed some great progress over the last year.

Once again we saw the difference between belt use in primary law states and secondary law states. It's no surprise that in our reauthorization bill we have 600 million dollars over 6 years to go to states encourage them to do the right thing, plus as much money as we could find to reward States who have already stepped up to the plate and done the right thing. We *need* primary belt laws in every State in this country. *[applause]* And we'll get there.

This issue of the paid ads often comes up. Everybody wants to know how we did. *Click-it or Ticket* cost 8 million dollars for that national media buy over a 2-week period. Even in places where you couldn't spend money on paid media, in corners of the country that haven't traditionally done paid ads, we were able to beam air support to your law enforcement to get the job done.

In addition to the media we purchased you supplied about another 15 million dollars or so of your own grant money to buy statewide and local media to support this effort. I think that it was over twenty five million dollars that we spent together over that 2-week period. This went on to spawn a whole bunch of earned media. Everybody in America thought, "*You know, maybe this is important. Maybe this is important. And you know what, this thing where the cops are going to give me a ticket. Hmmm. Maybe I'll buckle up.*" Lo and behold it worked.

We did a survey to find out how many people recognize *Click-it or Ticket* – it was **61%!** This was a multiple-choice test. Any political candidate in America would salivate to have 61% name-recognition on a survey. We had another section where people were asked, “Do you recall hearing or seeing a safety belt message recently – they were not prompted, they were not given multiple choice answers to choose from - this was a fill-in-the-blank test. 29% responded with, “Oh, you mean *Click-it or Ticket*.”

So we believe that there is value in a slogan that seems to be catchy and works and is meaningful and supports a very strong enforcement message.

We have some but not all of the state specific data in now. I always hesitate to point out particular states since we don't have all the data in yet, and it hasn't all been validated by our Center for Statistics and Analysis yet. But even so I want to report to you that John Moffet from Washington State has of course already told everybody that he remains the national champion at 93%. *[laughter]* But I *think* he deserves a hand anyhow. *[applause]* That's absolutely phenomenal.

Now our Regional Administrator in Region 9 wants to remind John that he is only the featherweight titleholder, that the heavy weight is still California - but we don't have their survey yet! *[laughter]*

We also got some fabulous conversion rates and I think we need to start thinking about conversion rates as we begin to get higher and higher belt usage. Alaska went from 65.8% belt use to 78.9 %, which means that they had to convert 38 % of their non-users to reach this new rate. *[applause]* Massachusetts and Oklahoma both converted 22% of their non-users and Oklahoma is now getting up in the range of the other primary law states, so we are very, very, happy about that. Utah with a secondary law has a belt use of 85.2%. Congratulations! That's just terrific. We still have much work to do.

Thank you to those who worked very hard in Illinois and Delaware to get those primary belt laws passed this year. The data are clear that this works. I hope that the 600 million dollars that we have in SAFETEA stays there so we can get all that money out to states to help them pass primary belt laws, support that will be fungible and flexible for their highway safety purposes.

Although we had a victory to celebrate in safety belt use, we still have a long hill to climb with impaired driving. We have more evidence that high visibility enforcement works. We have seen it work in the safety belt area. We believe it will also work in the alcohol area, which is why we are taking this approach with *You Drink and Drive. You Lose*. This alcohol campaign came right on the heels of *Click-it or Ticket* mobilization. You all came right back from that massive belt effort just three weeks later and did it again for alcohol.

My RA's told me, “They can get this job done.” It was just amazing to me how you were able to do this - to get your law enforcement on board - until I remembered these law

enforcement guys also get it. They are on a door step in the middle of the night like I was in a family room in the middle of the night, and I understand exactly what motivates them to change the behavior of the driving public.

This year was different for alcohol – this mobilization included the first national paid media campaign. How many of you saw the *You Drink & Drive. You Lose.* national ads? [*Hands go up.*] That's great, because they air on TV programs that are aimed at young males from 16 and 34 years of age. Those of you with your hands up around the room who watch *Dog Eat Dog*, we won't tell anybody. [*laughter*]

We know that there were no special grant funds made available to states for this crackdown, but many of you went out on your own and did media purchases and again we thank you. The police need this kind of air support to cover their effort on the ground. We intend to keep that up, keep giving this support to them.

All states participated to various degrees. The thirteen strategic evaluation states, which you see outlined in red on the slide, received some additional support. We were guided again by our data – these 13 states have either high alcohol fatality rates and/or high fatality numbers. Because we need to drive the numbers down nationally, those states received some additional attention.

So far we received partial reports from 40 states about the *You Drink & Drive. You Lose* campaign. From just these 40 States there were 15,254 DWI arrests reported during the crackdown period. That's about 5,000 people whose lives, I hope, will be turned around, will see this as a wake up call and will get the help they need to change their behavior.

Now given the resources available in SAFETEA we did build in significant incentives to support impaired driving in two ways. First, states that reduce their alcohol-related fatality rates will qualify for a share of grants that start with a total \$50 million in year one and increase each year to \$65 million by year six. Once again it's about results. It's about accountability for how those funds are spent.

Second, SAFETEA would establish grants that will provide additional support to the 10 or 12 states with the highest alcohol-related fatalities and fatality rates. We need to get in at the ground level and help those states with their alcohol problems so that we can get the national numbers changed.

I have a few slides on FARS and NASS, which will tell the rest of the story. Here is the fatality rate slide. Kathy already mentioned that the rate is indeed the lowest in history. The fatality rate is 1.51 per hundred million miles traveled in 2002. There was a two percent increase in the number of registered vehicles in 2002, a two percent increase in miles traveled and a general population increase of about one percent - which tells you how we were able to realize a better fatality *rate*, since the numbers of fatalities overall are not dropping.

This is not success, my friends - 42,815 deaths is not success. The majority of vehicle occupants killed in crashes, again, were not wearing safety belts. That trend continued in 2002. Last year, 59% of the 31,000 or so occupant fatalities were not restrained and about half of them would have lived if they had buckled up. Do the math in your head. That's why our safety belt program is so urgent. It's not just important; it's *urgent*. If we can do this tomorrow, we can change the numbers tomorrow. You will hear me continue to hark on this issue because we have simply got to get this done in every state in our nation.

The really good news here is what we're seeing in terms of the trend in injuries. Injuries went below 3 million for the first time in history last year. These are hard numbers; these aren't rates. This is great stuff, and we believe that it is due to people buckling their safety belts, as well as safety improvements in the vehicles themselves. People are going home from crashes now, people who would have ended up in the hospital in years past.

Here's the alcohol fatalities graph: again, flat as a pancake. It's similar to what we've seen in overall fatalities. The numbers are flat although we saw the rate change from .63 to .62. It's not as though we are losing tremendous ground here. We have some traction in this issue. I just think we need to redouble our efforts to work hard.

Let's talk for a minute about the situation for children. We're making great progress in protecting our youngest children. Fatalities among children to age 3 continue their decline and last year went below 500 for the first time. In a country as large as ours and populous as ours, to have less than 500 deaths in children below age 3 is a monumental achievement. Once again, you and your partners out there are to be congratulated.

The same thing holds true for children ages 4 to 7. In this age group fatalities decreased 12% last year and fell below 500 for the first time. Once again people are hearing the booster seat message as well as "*Kids in the Back*" in age-appropriate restraints. It's the result of public education as well as enforcement out there in the communities.

You know I always say this, but I'll say it again and I hope you will keep saying it as well: when it comes to children, even though it's less than 500 deaths in those two age groups, we can't declare victory ever in child safety because every few seconds or so there's another child born. There are more kids and there are more brand new parents who have never heard this message, people who need to hear this message. We have to keep doing this. As long as we are alive, we have to keep educating new parents about keeping their children safe. We're on the treadmill here, but that's okay.

We've not had the same kind of success with kids ages 8 to 15. Teenagers, of course, present a continuous problem so we will redouble our efforts to work on that as well.

Now, look at this busy slide. I just want you to stare at it for a second. It's a trend slide. Across the top are the years, and we have divided the fatality rate by mode of travel. I think it's important for you not to be disheartened by the fact that we are still at 1.51. I want to show you where that number comes from. What you are doing in safety belts is

paying off. We are gaining in this area, and we have to do incredible work to get to the goal of 1.0 by 2008. We've got to get 90% belt usage. We need to get primary belt laws in all the states. We have to get hold of impaired driving with high visibility enforcement, fix the court system, gear up with special prosecutors – the whole picture. But, we are gaining on this.

Where we are not gaining, where we are losing ground in fact, is with motorcycles. The problem with motorcycles is worsening. The motorcycle fatality rate is driving up the national fatality rate, making it very difficult to meet our goal. For the fifth year in a row, we had an increase in motorcycles fatalities. During the five year period on this slide, the nation had a 50% increase in motorcycle deaths. And once again about 44% of these were alcohol-related. Last year alone there was more than 8% increase in the number of alcohol-related motorcycle deaths.

Now, I don't ride a motorcycle. I'd like to but I'm scared. *[laughter]* But I'm told that judgment, coordination, and balance are what you must have to ride a motorcycle safely. And if you look at the physiological effects of alcohol, the first skills that are affected are judgment - "*Yeah, I can do that; I can make that gap!*" - coordination, and balance. The things that you need to ride a motorcycle are the very things that are impaired by even a low level of alcohol. We have to talk to our law enforcement colleagues and try to figure out how we deal with motorcyclists and this issue of alcohol.

Also contributing to this trend, obviously, is the disturbing fact that a number of states are repealing laws for protective equipment. Studies repeatedly show that repeals of helmet laws are directly associated with fatality increases. As with most safety issues, we can't do this from Washington. These are state issues. These battles are hard fought, and won or lost, at the State level. We can provide technical assistance and research data, and we will do that all day long if you ask. We will show up when invited, but the job is going to get done by you all.

So this goal that we have is very challenging. Many of you have seen this slide, too. In order to get to the national 1.0 fatality goal, we are talking about decreasing by 33,000 fatalities a year. But look at this: if we stay where we are, at a rate of 1.51, we will have 50,000 people dead in 2008. In 1966 there were 54,000 fatalities. Just resting on our laurels is simply not allowed. As I said in Long Beach and St. Louis, our goals have to be perfectly aligned with yours.

Once again, thank you Kathy, for fostering the 1.0 goal. Our goals have to be perfectly aligned, so that the resources that are spent are spent only towards getting those numbers down. I think you have seen our emphasis in SAFETEA, which is to align state and national goals through performance incentives, to provide awards and incentives for reaching scientifically determined goals in those areas of safety belt use, alcohol-related fatality reduction, and in data improvements - which is the last thing that I want to talk about.

All of these goals, as well as my entire agenda, are driven by traffic records, our national data, and your traffic safety records. Every state needs its own set of traffic records that are timely, accurate, complete and accessible so that you can guide your own programs. When fungibility and flexibility - the themes in SAFETEA - get to the States, you will have the data that you need to drive your programs.

I promise you that when Mary Peters, the head of FHWA, came up with the idea of a 1 billion dollar core program for FHWA funds, she was not thinking only about guard rails, median cables and road widening. She's thinking that *whatever* you need - whether it's programmatic, behavioral programs, or what have you - you will get it from that billion-dollar core safety fund, as well as your funds that are administered by NHTSA, if your data support it.

It's really important that your traffic records are complete, timely, accurate, accessible, and are interpreted in a way that is scientifically credible. In another part of our grant program we have included \$50 million dollars a year to help states improve their traffic records. We hope that you will do whatever is required to make certain that these records are accurate, complete, timely and accessible.

Finally, the U.S. is not in this totally alone. We are not the only one with renewed focus on traffic safety. On April 7, 2004, the World Health Organization, better known as W.H.O., will proclaim that day as World Health Day. High-level events worldwide will bring new attention to global road safety. This is another chance for us to get our message out in this country. The WHO tells us that by 2020 road traffic deaths are expected to be the third leading cause of deaths worldwide. We have best practices here that we can share with the world. Canada and Western Europe have best practices they can share with us. Australia and other countries that have best practices need to be very frank and forthright and share these on a global level.

I'm almost finished, but before I conclude, I want to mention something that is very personal to me. In 1984 or '85, I first encountered a document called *Injury in America*. It really framed for me what my life would be all about, what I saw in this revolving door of faces coming in and out of the emergency department. I learned there was really a science behind how this was tackled and how we could deal with this.

My senior advisor, Paul Jones, the former Governor's Representative of North Carolina, invited me to a conference in San Antonio. It was the Second National Conference on Injury Control. I went there and outside the room I ran into a lady many of you know. She said to me, "Jeff, I want you to go into that room and count the number of doctors that are here talking about prevention. I think that you will note by their absence that your presence here will open doors for you and will help you do great things." Bill Haseltine reminded me last night that those words were very prophetic.

The person who said that to me was Patricia Waller. We lost her just ten days ago. She was a pioneer; she was a mentor, and a friend to many of you. She died of cancer and I want to mention her name today because many of you in this room had the benefit of her

intelligence, her dedication, and her spirit - which will live on. Pat's death is not just a loss to Michigan and North Carolina, the states where she lived and worked, but truly is a loss worldwide.

I want you to look on either side of you, look around in this room. This is the next generation of giants here. You'll make the difference; you have seen it in the numbers. All we can do on this earth is to try to serve our fellow man and leave it a better place. All of you - like Pat Waller - are doing that in your own way. I'm very proud to be among you.

So I will leave you today with Secretary Mineta's quote: "All Hands, man your battle stations." Working together, my friends, we just saved a thousand people. Thank you very much.